

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1109
By Herron

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Dr. Robert Smith Sanders, child-safety pioneer.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Robert Smith Sanders of Murfreesboro; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sanders was an exemplary Tennessean and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; he was a champion and crusader for the health and safety of the citizens, particularly the children, of Rutherford County and the State of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, after lobbying for two years, Dr. Sanders, working with his wife, Pat, ultimately persuaded the General Assembly to pass a child restraint law requiring children under the age of four to ride in strapped seats while in any motor vehicle; thus, in 1977, Bob Sanders became known as "Dr. Seat Belt," and Tennessee became the first state in the nation to adopt such a law, after which every other state in the union followed suit; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sanders, a Tullahoma native, graduated from Castle Heights Military Academy, where he was captain of the football team; he completed his undergraduate degree and medical school at Vanderbilt University, and trained at Vanderbilt, in San Francisco, in Stockholm, Sweden, and in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, in October 1963, Dr. Sanders and his wife moved to his grandparents' farm in Rutherford County, where for many years afterward he enjoyed raising sheep, cattle, and crops; and

WHEREAS, he was a Murfreesboro pediatrician for almost three years before moving into the field of public health; beginning in 1969, he served as director and chief physician at the Rutherford County Health Department until his retirement in 1991; also held the position of

Rutherford County Medical Examiner from 1983 until his much-deserved second retirement in 1999; and

WHEREAS; after successfully working with the late Representative John Bragg to introduce and pass seat belt and child restraint legislation, Dr. Sanders and his wife continued to advocate against the “Babe in Arms” exemption to the child restraint law, which allowed parents to carry children in their arms while driving, instead of restraining them in car seats or seat belts; they lobbied vigorously for four years to convince legislators of the dangers to unrestrained, vulnerable children during accidents, until, indeed, the exemption was finally removed and stiffer fines were implemented for those who failed to obey the law; and;

WHEREAS, Bob Sanders further demonstrated his commitment to public health and safety by helping counties establish infant seat loaner programs to help low-income families; and

WHEREAS, he and his wife also testified persuasively during public hearings about the negative environmental impact of a proposed Superconducting Super Collider project, single-handedly causing the facility’s location to be moved from rural Rutherford County to Waxahachie, Texas, where it was eventually abandoned by the federal government;

WHEREAS, thousands of children who have emerged from wrecks unscathed as a result of riding in child restraint seats unquestionably owe their lives to the efforts of child safety pioneer Bob Sanders and his wife, Pat; while this gentle, soft-spoken physician might have seemed an unlikely warrior, his intelligence, tenacity, and determination propelled the State of Tennessee into a national leadership role, and left Tennessee citizens, particularly Tennessee’s children, deeply in his debt; and

WHEREAS, Bob Sanders was honored for his lobbying efforts by the Tennessee Medical Association, the Tennessee Public Health Association, and the Tennessee Pediatric Society; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sanders was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, by his passing, he was reunited with his parents, William Josiah Sanders, Jr. and Inez Smith Sanders; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sanders enjoyed the loving companionship of his wife of forty-three years, Patricia Pelot Sanders, and was the proud father of a son, Robert Smith Sanders, Jr., and daughter, Pricilla Pelot Sanders; and

WHEREAS, Bob Sanders leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Robert Smith Sanders was instrumental in the passage of child restraint legislation in Tennessee, the first of its kind in the country; it is thus fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the legacy of this sterling physician, farmer, pioneer, advocate, and crusader, whose passion earned him the title of "Father of the Seat Belt Law"; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we honor the memory of Dr. Robert Smith Sanders, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family, colleagues, and many friends of Dr. Robert Smith Sanders.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.